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By-Howards, Melvin

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Critical reading is viewed as requiring total involvement of the reader, and the classroom alive with questions, energy, and feelings is seen to facilitate such involvement. Critical reading involves looking at the world and its relationships of persons, places, things, and feelings. Teaching and encouraging environmental involvement from the first grade is emphasized. Additional emphasis is placed on experiences requiring a variety of human skills and sensitivity to seeking new relationships among objects and people. This sensitivity to new relationships along with the traditional critical reading skills should result in more effective reading. (RT)

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Dr. Melvin Howards
Director, Center for Educational Development
Northeastern University
102 The Fenway
Boston, Massachusetts 02115

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You have already "read" me critically. My blazer, a bold maroon with white buttons, long sideburns, relatively long hair, general appearance, have all been used by you as non-verbal clues to make some judgements about me and what I might say. This type of non-verbal critical person-reading is one of many components of what I consider critical reading. Typically, critical reading skills are taught (as is almost everything else) in a sequential and linear fashion which I believe is not only irrelevant but superficial. Not only is the non-verbal dimension ignored in most critical reading programs, elementary or secondary level, but there is a tendency to either ignore true critical reading or to offer it in the form of prescribed skills, at prescribed times, and generally it is taught as are most other reading skills, in isolation and out of context.

We can all list many of the critical reading skills, and almost everyone here can teach some of them to classes of students, so it is not my intent to review for you the names and groupings of skills classified as critical reading. Too much time has been spent, much of it wasted, in carefully listing and grouping skills, rather than establishing the conditions which will make the learning and application of these skills a relevant and live activity and experience for the readers. Before I veer off into my own conception of critical reading, let me make obeisance to the established order and mention some of those skills I consider most important in

developing critical readers: detecting propaganda is the most obvious area for skill development because the techniques used in propaganda of all types, at all levels, do indeed require interpretational skill beyond mere literal recall or literal transliterations of another person's statements; another part of the critical reading skills gestalt involves drawing inferences and making generalizations (which are in fact an integral part of all interpretation and critical reading, including propaganda); interpreting symbols and imagery in literature is another aspect of critical reading; discriminating between fact and opinion is actually a sub-division of what happens when a reader is critically handling propaganda, especially card stacking. This is not all of the skills one could list, but represents a good summary of the specific skills, and more importantly, represents the kind of thinking and reasoning and sensitive perception which is the core in any critical reading. So much then for a mention of the skills; let us now make our real visit to the realm of critical reading.

Several things are true about critical reading, and I'll mention them first and try to explain them as I view them, and as I have taught them to a wide variety of populations, youth and adult, black, brown, red and white around the country.

The first thing that is true, is that critical reading is not simply a set of skills, like those I briefly mentioned earlier, but rather critical reading is an organic whole of values, beliefs, information, feelings, conditions--in short, critical reading, at any level, requires the total participation of a whole person in a total environment. Learning the

propaganda techniques (one or all of them) is not all there is to critical reading, obviously. Or indeed, would I call it critical reading if a student knew and could apply in specific situations all of the skills I've listed. The whole, is indeed, greater than the sum of its parts in the area of critical reading.

The way a classroom is physically set up; the smell of the room, lighting, the psychic dimension and interrelationships between the students, and between the students and teacher. A classroom which stimulates critical reading and all interpretive reading goes far beyond selected materials; far beyond specific lessons. A classroom which stimulates critical reading is alive with questions, with energy and vitality, with feeling, as well as with information. Very little critical reading is taught anywhere I've ever been because these conditions do not exist; classrooms are ordered by prescription from someone else; the subject matter is controlled and carefully doled out, on schedule. The key to most classrooms I have observed is control, order--the need on the part of the teacher to "cover" material or skills. It is interesting to note that the word "cover" means to bury, to conceal, which is what happens most often, at all levels. Critical reading cannot be fertilized in such an arid climate.

Critical reading is the way we use students and teachers in their environment, the way we use words as windows through which they begin to see into life and experience. Critical reading is almost always and entirely a verbal matter, as is most of our education, and this is one of its

weaknesses. For critical reading is a total immersion in both printed matter being read by a person, a living, breathing, feeling person, in his environment--in and out of his skin. This is the way words become windows through which the critical reader begins to see into the author and his world, beyond his words, and this is the way the reader begins to see into himself and his realm of life experience.

Too often critical reading is presented as a series of skills, which are often only polished comprehension skills to get at basic information and a superficial glimpse at the meaning which I believe always exists, not in the words in print, but in the spaces between the words and in those unique spaces between a reader as a whole person and the writer as a whole person in a world in which many things occur simultaneously, not in a sequential or linear fashion.

Another "truth" about critical reading is that it is a way of looking at the world and its many interwoven relationships of persons, places, things and feeling, is that critical reading must be taught very early--the first grade. The critical reading facility, since it is much more than mere skills applied to particular matter, must be supported by foundations laid in every year from the first grade onward. Of course the quality of the interpretation will improve during the years, but what has to happen in the early grades if we are to get really perceptive critical readers in high school, is the development through involvement of youngsters in experiences which will call onthem to use all of their human skills and sensitivity, and not just exercise intellectual muscles the way many phonics or other reading skills

programs do. The essence of critical reading is seeing relationships, sensing moods, tone, and being able to bring to bear on all reading situations, verbal and nonverbal, a total awareness for what is occurring in the total field. Kids do not become this kind of sensitive as a result of distinct skills, instruction and practice, any more than we make poets in workbooks or in our lesson plans, Kids do become this kind of sensitive and therefore able to do some real critical reading, whether in newspapers, novels, poems or advertising, if from first grade onward an educational environment is developed with those kids which is filled with questions, with unsolved problems, with sensitivity to smell, taste, touch, sight, hearing--to experience and the kinds of relationships which make experience for all of us. The skills we teach can, at best, be highway signs pointing, as does all language, in the direction of the real and the live. The signs are not the destination, any more than learning phonics rules, or vocabulary roots is the core of critical reading.

Critical reading then is not just a set of skills offered in some predetermined order, nor is it just done at junior or senior high level. My experience in universities is that most of the students who do indeed have trouble staying in school, irrespective of their major field, lack critical reading skills. They have learned too well from us, starting in first grade, that one focuses on specific skills, specific formation and facts, and one never gets to the overall, the gestalt view of what an author is saying, on several levels beyond the verbal. Poetry is a joy for those who can

share, through the poet's words and images, or who can re-create in themselves the sensory realm and the intellectual realm of the author. If one reads poetry or any great literature as an exercise in vocabulary and definition, one has missed the whole point. Such persons, and they are in the vast majority, do not like to read much, and when they do they are most likely to be literal in their understanding of what has been said and why. It's like believing you are living in the reflection of a TV set; or believing you are living a human experience by saying words quietly to yourself as you look at a book.

We can create conditions for this kind of total immersion called critical reading if we think about the way almost all of us learned the most important things in our lives: how to speak our native tongue; how to feel and express love; how to survive in a threatening and ambiguous world. All of these universal human learnings did not come through a set of prescribed skills, lesson plans, homework or grades--they came through life experience, past words, and through some joy. Mother does not (usually) plan lessons for her two year old toddler on which elements will be taught this week. She talks to her child; she responds warmly and with joy and real interest; when she is pleased she expresses it both verbally and non-verbally and sincerely. The child likes language then; he likes communicating; he is curious and interested. He develops concepts, rules, judgements on his own, with little formal instruction and grading. Yet when he gets to school, especially when we teach him to read and write, all of that gives way to rigid work work and duty, and the fragmentation

of the entire world of information and experience and feeling.

Clearly a critical reader, of any age or grade level, must add to these integrated human elements we have mentioned, must be a certain kind of person and a certain kind of thinker--and they are intimately related to each other. I do not mean thinking in the usual sense of following a series of facts or other information and merely drawing some conclusion from them; I mean thinking in the organic sense of which I have been speaking. Thinking which knows specific information in several areas and subjects, and which naturally integrates these facts and information with a blended awareness of life experience, and feeling. No separation between thought and feeling and a very pervasive sensitivity to words, people, events--to the total world in which he finds himself. Classrooms can become such incubators for critical reading only if the teacher is so sensitized and willing to let learning and thinking occur in the global and non-sequential and non-linear ways so common. Humor and drama become part of the environment, as does music, art (in many of its forms), poetry (not just in books, but in children expressing all kinds of feelings and thoughts in their own way).

Perhaps I can give one illustration in the limited time remaining which bears on the last point and which is directly related to some means of stimulating and encouraging some critical reading sensors in students. Many teachers have always denigrated the use by students of colloquial or even street talk. They have criticized such language usage as in-

appropriate and closed the door. Yet if they would investigate these expressions they would find, as I have, the most sensitive use of language: metaphor. I don't mean that everything kids bring into class is necessarily a great poetic or literary contribution, but I do mean, and I do know, that many disadvantaged children and adolescents are verbal in different ways from the typical middle class child. They also know the value of non-verbal behavior and they know how to read people for the true meaning of what is being dressed up in good grammar.

Look at some of these common expressions of the type I have just mentioned: "pressed vines"--it's a metaphor. What do you think it means? Vines--clothing, good; pressed--special, the best. Yes. Pressed vines means the very best clothing you have. Let's look at it as metaphor: vines grow very closely on buildings or fences. Clothes which fit like vines do would be a perfect fit--painted on. Vines are a bit shiny and if they were pressed (which slightly mixes the basic image) they would be the most. Why not use this type of metaphor as a beginning to teaching poetry which depends on imagery and metaphor to such a large extent. Why must metaphor or other literary imagery and device be a textbook thing? Why can't imagery come from life more directly, which is what great imagery in literature does anyway.

Words like "bag" which you and I understood to mean an old unpleasant woman, means you are doing or are involved in the thing you like--how dull the educationese for this: aptitude!

I'm sure you can think of other such expressions. The point is that children of all ages come to us with a language and feelings about it, all derived from their lives and we do not use this raw material enough. It can be a significant part of the critical reading act we've been discussing. Such imagery can lead to others, and can develop greater sensitivity to seeking new relationships among objects, textures, people. All of this is part of the process of critical reading and thinking. Add to such sensitivity and awareness some of the usual skills, in new contexts, and critical reading becomes a way of life; a perspective.